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Universal periodic review

Operations of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review*

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 16/22 and decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and on the resources available to it. As indicated in the previous update report (A/HRC/32/27), in an effort to consolidate information related to the universal periodic review, and on the basis of Council decision 17/119, the secretariat aligned the timing of submission of the reports on the activities supported through the two universal periodic review trust funds, namely, the Voluntary Trust Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. Consequently, as from 2015, both annual reports are submitted to the Council at its June session. The present report provides an overview of contributions and expenditures, together with a description of activities funded since the previous report until 31 December 2016.

II. Financial situation of the Fund

2. Table 1 shows the detailed financial situation of the Fund as at 31 December 2016 (statement of income and expenditure).

* The present document was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent developments.

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Table 1
Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January-31 December 2016
(United States dollars)

Opening balance on 1 January 2016	***1 183 036.29***
Income	
Voluntary contributions received from Governments in 2016	
Cuba	1 884.00
Republic of Korea	25 000.00
Singapore	15 000.00
Miscellaneous and interest income	10 499.73
Total income	**52 383.73**
Expenditure[a]	
Staff costs	3 310.36
Fees and travel of experts and consultants	-
Travel of staff and representatives	82 300.25
Contractual services	-
General operating expenses	-
Supplies and materials	-
Grants, contributions and seminars	-
Programme support costs	11 278.92
Total expenditure	**96 889.53**
Miscellaneous adjustments/savings/refunds to donors	(54.90)
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2016	**1 138 475.59**

[a] Includes disbursements and obligations.

3. Since the establishment of the Fund, 16 countries have made financial contributions to it. In 2016, Cuba, the Republic of Korea and Singapore contributed US$ 1,884, US$ 25,000 and US$ 15,000, respectively.

4. Since the Fund has not enjoyed a predictable pattern of income, substantial resources are systematically kept as a reserve for future activities; the secretariat of the Fund has approved all requests, in line with the Fund's terms of reference, to enable participation in the universal periodic review.

III. Activities

A. Travel to meetings

5. Under the terms of reference of the Fund, financial support is made available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to cover travel to Geneva by one official government representative in order to participate:

(a) In sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during which the representative's country is considered;

(b) In plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council during which the outcome of the review of the representative's country is adopted.

6. The Fund also provides for the travel of official representatives (one per delegation) of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, that are members of the Human Rights Council and do not have a permanent mission in Geneva, to act as rapporteurs (namely, as members of the troika).

7. In 2016, 26 of the 35 States that could have benefited from the travel assistance of the Fund requested financial assistance to participate in the sessions of the Working Group at which they were reviewed or in the Human Rights Council plenary sessions: Antigua and Barbuda, Haiti, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mozambique, Niger, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Moldova, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Swaziland, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

8. Since March 2014, a more proactive approach through targeted correspondence has been implemented to encourage States to avail themselves of the support provided through the Fund. A few weeks prior to the session, the secretariat addresses correspondence to States that could benefit from the assistance of the Fund, indicating the first steps that need to be taken to request the assistance and setting out the main entitlements. Such a targeted approach has allowed States, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries without representation in Geneva and not very familiar with the human rights framework and machinery, to become more familiar with the Fund and to request support. In addition, the secretariat is ensuring, as much as possible, complementarity between the support provided through the Fund and that provided through the fund for small island developing States and least developed countries.

9. In addition to covering travel costs, the Fund also provides for the payment of a daily subsistence allowance at the rate applicable to Geneva at the time of travel. Under the standing official provisions for such travel, a Government formally requesting such assistance would be advised of the official entitlements for travel and daily subsistence allowance in connection with the required itinerary, which would then be reimbursed upon completion of the trip and upon provision of the necessary supporting documentation. That arrangement, however, proved onerous for many requesting Governments, which were unable to submit the claims documenting the travels and were therefore not reimbursed. In an effort to address that issue, between the seventeenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (21 October-1 November 2013) and November 2015, the secretariat arranged to provide economy class tickets prior to travel and paid the daily subsistence allowance upon arrival in Geneva, thereby alleviating most of the difficulties associated with retroactive reimbursement of expenses.

10. In November 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), together with most of the United Nations Secretariat, started using Umoja, which has completely changed the way in which the Secretariat manages its administration, executes its work processes, conducts its business and manages its resources. The new system also implies some changes to the way travel arrangements are processed. Although the system is still subject to adjustments, once a Government requests the assistance of the Fund, it is advised of the official entitlements for travel and daily subsistence allowance. OHCHR is required to make the necessary arrangements for the issuance and payment of the ticket in advance. The daily subsistence allowance is provided in two instalments, with 75 per cent of the total amount paid in advance, either by bank transfer or upon arrival in Geneva, and the remaining amount and terminal expenses disbursed after the completion of the mission on the basis of required documentation.

11. The direct ticketing does, however, require more advance planning since Governments are required to designate their delegate with sufficient lead time to enable the secretariat to make the travel arrangements and issue the ticket in accordance with the United Nations official travel policies. However, and unlike the practice until November 2015, in cases where such direct ticketing is not possible, the previous arrangement for retroactive reimbursement of travel expenses can no longer be provided. Undoubtedly, the fact that retroactive travel reimbursement is no longer an option under Umoja has had a substantial impact on the support provided to States.

12. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of financial assistance and annual expenditures, complete with the amount authorized, status of reimbursement and total commitments to date with regard to the financial assistance provided for the travel of government delegates to Geneva.

Table 2
Expenditures for travel of government representatives to attend sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council

Year	*Number of countries funded*	*Amount authorized/pending claim (United States dollars)*	*Amount paid (United States dollars)*
2008	6	13 250.00	16 885.00
2009	17	33 846.00	23 568.00
2010	23	46 365.00	39 942.00
2011	21	81 778.00	11 698.00
2012	3	12 920.00	11 295.00
2013	6	35 176.00	35 176.00
2014	15	57 564.00	53 939.00
2015	23	18 268.00	95 512.00
2016	26	104 113.00	82 300.25
Total			**370 315.25**

B. Training

13. The terms of reference of the Fund allow the financing of briefings prior to the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review to assist countries in the preparatory process. These briefings usually consist of plenary segments and breakout group discussions during which the policies, procedures and modalities of the universal periodic review are examined, information is exchanged and good practices and lessons learned are discussed concerning the organization of national consultations, the setting up of interministerial coordination mechanisms, the drafting of national reports and participation in the interactive dialogues held by the Working Group and the Human Rights Council in plenary session.

14. Increased efforts have been invested in keeping States engaged in cooperation with the universal periodic review mechanism. This relates in particular to small island developing States and least developed countries with no representation in Geneva.

15. In view of the fact that States scheduled for review in 2016 and covered by the targeted outreach involving bilateral briefings in New York and, whenever relevant, in Brussels, were briefed in 2015, no bilateral meetings were held in 2016. In addition, no regional briefings were organized at the end of the second cycle.

16. In the context of OHCHR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union partnership, a panel discussion was held during the thirty-second session of the Human Rights Council, in June 2016, to discuss how the role of parliamentarians in the work of the Council, in particular the universal periodic review, could be strengthened and how the work of the Council could be used by national parliaments to promote and protect human rights. The participation of one of the five panellists was funded by the Fund while the Inter-Parliamentary Union contributed through the participation of one expert.

IV. Conclusions

17. **During the reporting period, the Voluntary Trust Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review continued to facilitate the participation of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review at which they were considered. Assistance was also provided to requesting States to enable them to participate in the adoption of their outcome document by the Human Rights Council during its plenary sessions. In that regard, the secretariat started following up with delegations through a more**

proactive approach, which included sending targeted correspondence, to ensure that all States entitled to assistance under the Voluntary Fund availed themselves of the opportunity. The initial difficulties experienced since the implementation in November 2015 of Umoja were slowly being overcome. Whenever difficulties were faced, the secretariat made all possible efforts to limit the impact on delegations in need of support.

18. **Since the inception of the universal periodic review and in recognition of the inherent related challenge of ensuring that participation is indeed universal, the needs and constraints of least developed countries have been considered. Ensuring the informed, regular and full participation of States with little resources and no representation in Geneva, in addition to all other States, requires regular outreach activities. Although no bilateral meetings were held in New York or Brussels and no field-based briefings were organized in 2016, it is envisaged that the start of the third cycle of the universal periodic review will result in a new round of briefings. The secretariat is exploring the best options to continue to support States not only to participate in the reviews but for the review to be understood as a full process, in particular at the national level, focusing on the implementation of recommendations made during the previous cycles. The importance of national follow-up and reporting processes is regularly emphasized and initiatives to support the efforts of States in that regard are being developed by OHCHR.**